

PREFACE

We present the reader with another volume, the twelfth in the Social Work Series, the result of years-long joint efforts by the Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and the Protestant University of Applied Science, Evangelische Fachhochschule in Berlin. We value this cooperation and all the actions that have been undertaken under it, such as guest lectures by professors of both universities, an international undergraduate exchange under the Socrates/Erasmus programs, or short visits of university staff members to study the work of social services.

Without a doubt, an added – if not the primary – effect of this cooperation is a chance for discussion, an international exchange of experience, and a reflection on subjects as important as they are difficult and arousing in their supporters, critics, and observers a gamut of emotions. The area that is attracting growing interest from researchers and reformers of the Polish social life is social work – a special discipline in that it features a wealth of theoretical underpinnings, approaches, and strategies together with broad applicational capabilities.

Contemporary debate on social work in Poland and in Germany focuses on search for new ways of giving help and support to people left outside mainstream society. On the one hand, the complexity and ambivalence of social work's scope shows that social realities may be and are variously perceived; on the other, it poses ever new questions and challenges that as yet defy clear answers. Still, even given its multidimensional and heterogeneous nature, social work always refers to the individual and the fundamental question of the quality of human life.

Despite all these difficulties, it is worth pursuing social work, discussing questions that have so far eluded effective remedies even in the most advanced democracies. In the present volume we attempt to engage in just such debate, focusing on broadly defined problems of poverty and social exclusion, with particular emphasis on children and families. Other issues addressed include professionalized help to individuals who need it, economic measures, and social policies to help improve the social functioning of individuals. Also discussed is the international dimension of social work and its impact on shaping further developments in this field.

Such reflection on the essence of social work and exchange of thoughts between social scientists representing two communities differing in cultural, economic and political backgrounds seems especially important and valuable to those professionally involved in the discipline. All the more reason for us to thank our Berlin colleagues and to hope that this significant cooperation will continue in the future. It is also important to stress that this volume would not have appeared without the contribution of Polish colleagues who put in much effort to develop their respective articles, which is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

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